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CRITICAL REMARKS

ON THE

Editions of Diego de Landa's Writings

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No document bearing upon the ancient Maya civilization of Yucatan surpasses in importance the work written by Diego de Landa, the second Bishop of the Diocese of Mérida, who was a resident of Yucatan from 1549 until 1579, the year of his death. The description of the country and its inhabitants which he composed has been preserved to us in one MS. copy, now in the library of the Royal Academy of History, at Madrid. In the winter of 1863-4, the late Abbé Brasseur (de Bourbourg) transcribed a portion of it, and published it with notes, and a translation into French, the following summer, under the title, *Relation des Choses de Yucatan de Diego de Landa, etc.* (Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1864). As it contained the signs of the calendar, and what purports to be the alphabet of the Maya hieroglyphic writing, as well as much material relating to the customs of the natives, Landa's *Relation* at once took a leading position among Americana.

The well-known peculiarities of the Abbé Brasseur, however, the freedom with which he dealt with his authorities, and the license he allowed his imagination, have always cast an atmosphere of uncertainty about his work,* and hence it was a decided

*This general distrust with reference to the particular instance of the Landa MS. has been very vigorously expressed by Dr. P. J. J. Valentini in his article on the Landa alphabet, in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* for 1880, p. 91.

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satisfaction to have published at Madrid, in 1884, under the competent supervision of Don Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado, a literal, faithful copy of the original text. Unfortunately, it appears simply as an appendix to the Spanish translation of M. Leon de Rosny's work on the hieratic writing of Central America, and is issued to the limited number of 200 copies, all large folio. It is therefore both difficult to obtain and needlessly expensive. Moreover, the editor, for fear of "distracting the reader," as he tells us, pointed out only a few of the differences between the correct text and that printed by Brasseur, so that the real value of the second edition of the text is not apparent until a long and toilsome comparison has been made.

The leading position which Landa's *Relacion* holds with reference to the ancient Maya civilization has led me to examine his words with care, and the notes I have made will, I believe, prove of value to those who are engaged in the study of this remarkable people. I shall arrange these notes in three portions, as they refer to the two texts now printed, to the Abbé Brasseur's translation with its notes, and to the hieroglyphic signs, etc., inserted in the text.

The Text.

In Brasseur's edition the text is divided into numbered sections, each with an appropriate heading. No such arrangement is in the original. What is more objectionable, many of the paragraphs and even sections as arranged by Brasseur are entirely arbitrary, and do not correspond at all with the paragraphing of the original. Sometimes they begin in the midst of a phrase, cutting it in two, and destroying its meaning.

He omits, without a word, fully one-sixth of the whole text. In his edition, p. 346, he concludes with the words, *aquí acaba la obra de Landa*, "here closes the work of Landa." No such words are in the original. On the contrary, the MS. he copied from continued with a number of chapters, one on the reason why the Indians offered human sacrifices, others on the serpents, animals, trees, etc., of Yucatan. Of these, Brasseur says not a syllable. In copying he occasionally, but rarely, omitted sentences, doubtless through haste. An instance of this occurs, p. 328, where three lines of the original are dropped immediately after the word *escalera*, terminating the sentence.

He did not hesitate occasionally to alter the original when he could not get at its meaning conveniently. Thus, p. 100, he prints "pero que a parte de los españoles," whereas the original is "pero que entre los Españoles," which conveys exactly the opposite sense. Again, p. 162, lines 2, 3, he writes "otras se separavan partes de su cuerpo," where the original is "se sejavan." Oddly enough, in the note on p. 104, he claims to have altered the text from "tres fiestas" to "otras fiestas," whereas the latter alone stands in the original.

The proof-reading of Brasseur's Spanish text leaves something to be desired. On the first page I have noted three errors, *vaya* for *via*, *haz el* for *haz á*, and *hiervas* for *sierras*, which last error he carries into his translation. Others, as *llamaron* for *llevaron*, p. 20, line 1, and *alcangaron* for *alancearon*, p. 76, line 10, are not much misleading.

Of greater moment is his inaccuracy in both the spelling and translation of proper names and Maya words. I shall mention a few of these :

Taiza, p. 4. This is for *tah itza*, "the lord or ruler of the Itzas."

Ulumil Cuz y Etel Ceh, p. 6. These Maya words were understood and translated by Brasseur as two distinct names connected by the copulative conjunction *y, et, and*. This is not the case. They form one term, the correct spelling of which is *uluumil cutz yetel ceh*, "the land of the wild turkey and deer."

Cuzmil, p. 12. The "Swallow-island," *ah-cuzamil peten*, according to the *Diccionario Maya-Español del Convento de Motul, MS.*, was also called *Oycen* and *Oycib*. In these names *cen* means "ornament," and *cib*, "wax," while the prefix *oy* is an interjection.

Maya, p. 14. The form adopted by Brasseur, *Ma-ay-ha*, meaning "there is no water," is incorrect. This phrase in the Yucatecan tongue is *Ma yan ha*. For a more plausible derivation of the word *Maya*, see *The Maya Chronicles*, p. 16 (Philadelphia, 1880, vol. I of Brinton's *Library of Aboriginal American Literature*).

The names of the idols mentioned, p. 16, read in the original *Ixhunié*, and *Ixhunieta*, not *Ixbunié*, etc. The prefix *ix* in all four names is the feminine particle. The meanings are :

Ix-chel, the Lady of the Rainbow, or "of the Cheles."

Ix-chebel-yax, the Lady of the green (blue) feathers.

Ix-hun-yei, the one chosen Lady.

Ix-hun-yeta, the Lady with the one adornment.

Mochcovoh, p. 18. The *Covohes* are referred to, p. 72, as the name of the tribe near Champoton. The word *Covoh* is applied to a poisonous spider found in Yucatan, and here probably has a totemic signification. It is still, says Dr. Berendt, a common family name among the Mayas.

On p. 30, the original has *Cochnah* instead of *Cochuah*; but the latter is probably correct, being a simple compound of *coch*, broad or large, and *uah*, bread or tortilla. *Hocabaihumun* has no terminal *n* in the original. The proper form I expect is *Hocabai-hunhun*, "cosa asentada en el suelo cada año," referring to the year-stones which were annually set up.

Kikoch, p. 52, orig. *Tiboch*. The former is correct. It means "at (the place of) the castor-oil plants" (*ti*, at, *xkoch* or *koch*, the *Ricinis communis*).

Mai, p. 42. This word means ordinarily snuff, or pulverized tobacco. Brasseur, in his note, derives from it the name Maya, forgetting that on p. 14 he had assigned a different etymology.

Tutulxiu, p. 46. On the derivation of this name see *The Maya Chronicles*, p. 109.

Dilan, p. 52. The proper form is *oilaan*, and means something filled, realized, perfected, attested, etc.

Chicaca, p. 70. Brasseur says that Cogolludo calls this province *Chavacha-Húa*. This is inaccurate. Cogolludo's words are "Choáca, que los Indios llaman Chuuachaá" (*Hist. de Yucathan*, Lib. II, cap. viii). This is a compound of *chauac*, large, great, and *ha*, water.

Vamuxchel, p. 76. The original has *Namuxchel*. The correct form may be *Namach Chel*, the distinguished Chel; or *Vamac Chel*, some one of the Chels, or, he who is a Chel.

Copo, p. 148, is the *Ficus rubiginosa* (Aznar, *Plantas de Yucatan*, p. 231).

Iztahte, p. 184, stands for *yitz tahté*, which is the native name for turpentine.

Mitnal, p. 200, is spelled by Beltran, *Arte de la Lengua Maya*, *Metnal*. Brasseur's derivation from Nahuatl *Mictlan* is probable.

Ixtab, p. 202. Compounded of the feminine prefix *ix*, and *tab*, which as a verb means "to tie to something," and as a noun, the gallows.

Uinal-Hun-Ekeh, p. 204. In the original this reads *Vinal*, *Hunekeh*. Of these words *uinal* is the ordinary Maya word for month; *hun* is "one"; but *ekeh* does not appear in any of the dictionaries. Perez *Dicc. Maya*, gives *Keh* as "the seventh day."

Zacab, p. 212. Brasseur explains this in a note as "une sorte de mais moulu"; but the *Diccionario de Motul*, gives *gakab*, "la caña del mais," cornstalk. The name of the deity, therefore, was "The Nine Cornstalks." On the same page, *zakah* is in the usual form *gaca*, and is pulverized roasted maize mixed with cold water. *Kanté*, on the same page, is not the cedar, as the editor supposes, which in Maya is *Kuche*, but "a tree from whose roots the natives obtain a yellow dye" (*Dicc. Motul*).

Kawil, p. 216, does not appear in the dictionaries. The Abbé's suggestion that it is an error for *Kabul* is possibly correct; or it may be for *Kawal*, which means one who is very choice in food and raiment (*Dicc. Motul*).

Batel-okot, p. 218, means "battle dance." The similarity of the Maya *batel* or *bateel*, to battle, a battle, to the English I have elsewhere noted as an odd coincidence.

Chacan-cantun, pp. 220, 222. The original has *chacacantun*, and also *Canzienal* in place of *Canziemal* in Brasseur's text.

On p. 222 and elsewhere instead of *zac-u-uayeyab*, the original text gives uniformly *zacuuayayab*.

The Translation.

Bishop Landa's writings on this subject were evidently mere memoranda, jotted down to await future arrangement and revision. The copyist contributed to their obscurity, so that passages of his *Relacion* present peculiar difficulties, some of which have led his translator wide of the mark. I shall point out some of the most notable of these.

p. 4. "tiene mucha lama"; "la plage y est tres etendue"; more correctly "a beaucoup de limon."

p. 16. "que por esto le llamaron Lazaro"; "que les Espagnols appellent de Lazare"; better "et pour cela ils l'appellent Lazaro."

p. 24. "seis soles" is translated "trois soleils."

p. 32. "tres cuentas de piedra buenas"; "trois objets de pierre bleu travaillés." It is not easy to see where this sense was obtained.

p. 74. The space left blank at the beginning of § xiii is unnecessary, and there is no need to supply a supposed omission. The sense is "The adelantado did not occupy the best position for one who had enemies," etc.

p. 116, line 1. The words "les parecia muy mal," do not mean "bien qu'elle leur parût mauvaise," but "ce qui les défigurait beaucoup." Later, on the same page, "cuero de venado por curtir seco," does not mean "cuir de bêtes fauves tanné á sec," but "de cuir sec de chevreuil."

p. 136. "Llamanse aora los nombres de Pilar los propios"; "Leurs noms propres aujourd'hui sont comme Pilar," etc. This is a singular mistranslation. The baptismal font in Spanish is *pila*, and "nombres de pila" means "christened names." The meaning evidently is "they now call themselves by their baptismal names."

p. 158. Speaking of the wooden idols which descended from father to son, Landa says they were considered the most valuable part of the heritage, "tenidos por lo principal de la herencia." This Brasseur translates "ils y avaient la plus grand confiance."

On p. 174 there are two important errors. Line 2, "los quales llaman *holcanes*" does not mean "à l'appel des *holcans*," but "qu'on appellait *holcans*"; and "que á esos *holcanes* sino era en tiempo de guerra no davan soldada," means that the *holcans* did not receive pay except in time of war, and not at all "Quant aux *holcans*, ils n'amenaient point la milice hors du temps de la guerre."

Equally incorrect is the translation of the description of the manner in which the natives wore their mantle, p. 186. But it will not be profitable to continue pointing out such slips. I have said sufficient to show that Brasseur's translation must be carefully compared with the Spanish text before it is accepted.

A very curious error in translation occurs on pp. 48 and 172, but this time it must be charged to the account, not of the Abbé, but of the Bishop himself. On p. 48, bottom, there is the extraordinary statement that as an article of defensive armor

the natives wore "jacos fuertes de sal y de algodón," "strong jackets (made) of salt and cotton!" And this is repeated, p. 172, with the specific addition that these jackets were "quilted doubly with salt for grinding!" No wonder the Abbé was nonplussed by this outrageous assertion! (See his note to p. 49.) The explanation is interesting. The word in the Maya language for salt is *taab*, while that for a twisted strand or cord is *tab*, the only difference being in the length of the vowel. Evidently Bishop Landa, or the person from whom he derived his information, mistook the native description of these quilted jackets. They were of cotton and *twisted cords (tab)*, the layers of the former being quilted to the latter. The historian of Yucatan, Father Cogolludo, refers to them, stating that they were called by the Mexicans (Nahuas), *ichcavipiles*. This is a sound Nahuatl word, found in Molina's *Vocabulario*, and shows that the same defense was known and employed by the Aztecs. It was also familiar to the tribes of Maya lineage in Guatemala.

The Maya Characters.

A close comparison of the various Maya characters printed in Brasseur's edition with those in the Madrid copy proves that in the main his tracings were accurate.

The Calendar beginning on p. 240 reveals, however, a number of minor differences. All of Brasseur's characters tend more to the circular form than those in the later edition which are approximately quadrangular. Occasionally points of detail differ considerably, as for instance, on p. 240, the signs *Ix* and *Cib*. The lines for the month signs are much fainter and sharper in Brasseur, and that of the month *Minan* is incomplete, lacking a bracket-shaped appendage to the left.

The Katun-wheel on p. 312 in the Madrid edition has the inscription in its centre. The Maya words should read *u uazaklom Katun*, "their return the Katuns," *i. e.*, the return or revolution of the Katuns. Brasseur translates the Spanish rendering of this, "gerra de los Katunes" by "la guerre ou le jeu des Katuns." The word *gerra* means neither game nor war, but is dialectic for *gira* or *giro*, from *girar*, to turn around.

In the important matter of the alphabet on p. 320, Brasseur makes only one serious error, that is, that he places the first form of the letter b (No. 4 of his list) lengthwise instead of up-

right. He was led into what I think was another error by the disposition of the letters in the MS. As the Madrid edition gives a photo-lithograph of the two pages of the original text containing the alphabet and its explanation, we are in a position to examine it satisfactorily. The figures are arranged in three parallel lines across the page, and the two figures for *u*, stand, the first at the end of one line, the second at the beginning of the next. From their evident connection with the sign for the sky at night, I am of opinion that they belong together as members of the same sign. Or did either member of the pictographic composite serve as indicating its phonetic value?

The designs of buildings as given by Brasseur, pp. 328, 332, 342, are much neater and more regular than in the original, where they are simply out-lined with a pen neither steady nor skillful. The disposition of the parts is, however, the same in both.

From these remarks it will be seen that Don Juan de Dios de la Rada y Delgado has laid students of Maya culture under positive obligations by this new and complete edition of Landa's most important work, and it should find a place in those public and private libraries which aim to have at all a complete list of consulting Americana.

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